

Message Text

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FOL TEL SENT ACTION SECSTATE FROM PORT AU PRINCE DTD 17 MAR 1977
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S E C R E T PORT AU PRINCE 0964

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TAGS: PINT, PFOR, HA, US

SUBJECT: PLANS TO OVERTHROW DUVALIER GOVERNMENT

REF: PORT AU PRINCE 0930 (EXDIS)

1. EMBASSY POLITICAL OFFICER HAS BEEN TOLD BY SOURCE WE
CONSIDER RELIABLE, ALTHOUGH PERHAPS OVER-CONFIDENT OF SUCCESS,
THAT PLANS ARE WELL-ADVANCED FOR THE OVERTHROW OF THE PRESENT
GOVERNMENT OF HAITI. SOURCE SAID GOH KNOWS A "COUP" IS PLANNED
BUT THAT GOVERNMENT DOES NOT KNOW WHEN IT WILL COME OR FROM
WHERE. SOURCE TOLD US MOVE WOULD COME NO LATER THAN APRIL 21 --
SIXTH ANNIVERSARY OF JEAN-CLAUDE DUVALIER'S ACCESSION TO POWER.

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2. SOURCE WOULD NOT REVEAL NAMES, AT THIS TIME, OF THOSE
PLANNING COUP BUT SAID MANY MEMBERS OF SUCCESSOR GOVERNMENT
ALREADY IDENTIFIED. PLANNERS CLAIM SUPPORT WITHIN HAITIAN
MILITARY AS WELL AS CONTACTS WITH EXILE GROUPS IN U.S. THEY
SEE PRESENT ELECTRICITY CRISIS, GROWING ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES,
AND INEPT GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP AS FACILITATING THEIR PLANS.

PLANS ARE SUFFICIENTLY ADVANCED SO THAT THREE POTENTIAL PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES (NAMES NOT DISCLOSED) HAVE COME FORWARD, BUT HOW FINAL CHOICE WILL BE MADE IS UNCLEAR. ORIENTATION OF PLANNERS APPEARS TO BE LIBERAL, PROGRESSIVE, AND PRO-U.S.; "COMMUNISTS" ARE TO BE RIGOROUSLY EXCLUDED AND "MUST NOT BE ALLOWED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF CHAOTIC SITUATION."

3. SOURCE CLAIMED THAT "OUR PEOPLE IN NEW YORK" HAD RECEIVED USG ASSURANCES THAT THEY WOULD NOT BE BETRAYED TO GOH AND THAT USG WOULD "LOOK THE OTHER WAY" WHEN THEY WERE READY TO MOVE. PRESIDENT CARTER IS CREDITED WITH THIS CHANGE OF POLICY FROM PREVIOUS ADMINISTRATIONS WHICH, SOURCE CHARGED, CONSISTENTLY INFORMED DUVALIERS OF OPPOSITION THREATS. PRINCIPAL WORRY OF PLANNERS IS THAT ONE OF THEIR ARMED FORCES CONTACTS MIGHT BETRAY THEM.

4. COMMENT: ATTEMPTS AND PLANS TO OVERTHROW THE REGIME OF THE DUVALIERS HAVE BEEN LEGION AND MOST HAVE HAD LITTLE PROSPECT OF SUCCESS. THE SUCCESS OF THESE CURRENT PLANS WILL DEPEND ON SUPPORT OF THE KEY MILITARY LEADERS, A FACTOR ABOUT WHICH WE KNOW LITTLE. THE MOST EFFECTIVE BLACK OFFICERS, HOWEVER, HAVE APPEARED UNSHAKABLE IN THEIR LOYALTY TO DUVALIER AND TO THE DUVALIERIST SYSTEM, AND WE CAN IDENTIFY FEW, IF ANY, WHO WOULD BE LIKELY TO JOIN A COUP WHICH HAD A SIGNIFICANT MULATTO COMPONENT OR TIES WITH THE HAITIAN EXILES. NEVERTHELESS, IN THE CURRENT ATMOSPHERE OF ECONOMIC ADVERSITY AND POLITICAL MALAISE (REFTEL), THE TIMES ARE PROPITIOUS.

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5. RECOMMENDATIONS: 1) THAT U.S. ADOPT A STRICT "HANDS OFF" POLICY TOWARD ANY ATTEMPT TO OVERTHROW THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT OF HAITI; (2) THAT DEPARTMENT AUTHORIZE US TO DRAFT CONTINGENCY PRESS GUIDANCE, FOR USE IN EVENT OF A SUCCESSFUL COUP, STRESSING OUR POLICY OF NONINTERFERENCE, OUR CONCERN FOR THE WELL-BEING AND OPPORTUNITY FOR ECONOMIC PROGRESS OF ALL THE HAITIAN PEOPLE, AND OUR INTENTION TO CONTINUE THE ORDERLY ADMINISTRATION OF OUR AID PROGRAMS WHICH, LIKE THOSE OF REST OF INTERNATIONAL DONOR COMMUNITY, ARE DESIGNED TO HELP THOSE SECTORS OF HAITIAN SOCIETY MOST IN NEED.

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